

BEING AN AMERICAN

Introduce topic.

- What countries did your ancestors come from? Use world map and mark countries of origin.
- Do any of you know the circumstances that led your ancestors to immigrate here?
- How did they get here and where did they arrive?

From 1892 until 1954, 12 million immigrants arrived in America at Ellis Island in New York City. Today Ellis Island is preserved as part of the National Park Service and thousands visit it to see where their ancestors arrived. It is estimated that 40% of Americans have an ancestor who came through this reception center in New York Harbor.

- To visit Ellis Island, you travel by ferry from Battery Park at the tip of Manhattan or from Liberty State Park in New Jersey. (The ferries stop at Liberty Island with the Statue of Liberty, as well as at Ellis.) The first thing you see when you enter the Baggage Room is a pile of baskets, trunks, and suitcases similar to those brought by new arrivals. (Show photos of the baggage pile.) What do you think people brought with them in those cases? What might you have brought?
- Emma Lazarus' famous poem, "The New Colossus," is at the base of the statue.
- Share photos and readings from books like *Ellis Island, Gateway to the American Dream* and *Hope and Tears – Ellis Island Voices*.

General Colin Powell contributed this essay in 2005 to the This I Believe project: "The America I Believe in." Read essay aloud.

- Powell speaks of immigrants as well as the visitors who come to America and return home to tell of their experiences. What experience would you like to share with new immigrants and visitors to our shores? What would help them to understand America and our values? (Some people want to take visitors to Washington, DC or NYC, to visit their families, to a small town, to an election...) EX: I would like to take new immigrants and visitors to see the American public library. Public libraries are truly democracy in action...

- Powell speaks of “an America that sometimes seems confused and is always noisy. That noise has a name – it’s called democracy and we use it to work through our confusion.”
 - What do you think of this description of democracy? How would you describe it?
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If there is time...

“Most early Americans, if you exclude the important category of Native Americans, were African slaves, convicts from Britain who were forcibly shipped to America, and indentured servants.”

Read excerpt from *Bound With an Iron Chain: The Untold Story of How the British Transported 50,000 Convicts to Colonial America*, (2011). “Convict transportation adds new dimensions to popular notions of immigration to early America that go beyond Pilgrims and brave men crossing the Atlantic in search of religious freedom and unlimited opportunity in a new, untamed land. Most of the people transported to America ... came out of the ranks of the destitute poor. Between 1700 and 1775, a total of 585,800 immigrants arrived in the 13 colonies from all over the world. About 52,500 of these immigrants were convicts and prisoners (9%). Slaves by far constituted the largest group (278,400; 47%), followed by people arriving with their freedom (151,600; 26%) and indentured servants (96,600; 18%). Note that almost three-quarters of all the people arriving in the American colonies did so without their freedom.”

- How would the experiences of these early European settlers have differed from today’s immigrants? What would be similar?

What symbols do you think represent America? (flag, Statue of Liberty, Uncle Sam, eagle...)

Some people, like author Barbara Kingsolver, would like a new symbol for American patriotism. Read a piece from her book of essays, *Small Wonder*, called “And Our Flag Was Still There.” She wrote this in 2002, shortly after 9/11.

Writer and commentator Andy Rooney shares another view. Rooney was a reporter for the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* during World War II before his career in broadcasting that led to a long stint on *60 Minutes*. This is from his book of essays, *Out of My Mind*, published in 2006. “Using the Flag”

- What do you think of Rooney’s views on the flag?